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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ, THE DAMASCUS MEETING
COMMUNIQUE

Summary

-- A lead story in all papers today, November 4, focuses on the situation in Iraq, reporting the assassination of Iraqi collaborators with the occupation - including the head of court in Najaf and the head of Al-Karkh suburb in Baghdad - and the bombardment of Bremer's headquarters as well as an attack on Mosul airport. Headlines highlight President Bush's statement within a speech he delivered in Birmingham, Alabama, that the United States "will not run from Iraq." According to Al-Rai, the Washington Post quoted U.S. officials as saying that former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz told U.S. investigators that Saddam Hussein was under the belief that the U.S. attack on Iraq was merely a "trick" and that Saddam was convinced of the possibility of avoiding a war based on assurances from French and Russian mediators.

On the domestic front, Prime Minister Faisal Al-Fayez continued meetings with members of Parliament to discuss the Government's program during the next stage. While meeting with members of the National Parliamentary Action Front bloc yesterday, Al-Fayez said that the foundation of a modern and democratic electoral law requires examination and dialogue.

Editorial Commentary on the Damascus Meeting

-- "The Bankruptcy of the Occupation"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (11/04): "The U.S. policy in Iraq has reached the verge of bankruptcy as it constitutes a series of assumptions that are against reality and lies that are exposed by facts ... Since the beginning, nothing in Iraq went according to expectations. This is because everything was built on lies for the sake of some covert ideas by the U.S. right wing that are characterized by extremism and are based on deceiving public opinion. Those ideas are serious due to their superficiality and simplicity - something which the administration is too stubborn to admit while the whole world is astonished as it watches the super power's entanglement in those ideas.

Noting that the peak of simplicity lies in the fact that no attention was given to "the Day After" and that it was simply believed that Iraq could be ruled for a couple of years by a "a military ruler," Nimri concludes: "The peak of the tragedy lies in the fact that some news from Iraq cannot be differentiated from news from Palestine. For example, punishing the people for not cooperating in shoveling palm trees and other fruit trees from the territories where the clashes are taking place. If the extent of resistance to the occupation is what we see nowadays, what would the resistance be like after treating the inhabitants in such a manner? And what is the meaning of the continuation of this occupation, which is inevitably destined to disappear?!"

-- "Ministers of the Six Neighboring Countries"

Commenting on the final communique of the Damascus meeting, daily columnist Uraib Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (11/04): "No one expected some neighboring countries (with Iraq) to admit responsibility for accusations leveled by the Americans and the Iraqis. Claiming innocence of those accusations was totally expected albeit not convincing at all. News keep coming in about confessions from defendants, some Salafi fundamentalist forces are strongly active within the Sunni triangle with support from their

authorities in the vicinity and abroad and the experience in South Lebanon and Hizbullah's resistance is perceived by many parties as a model that can be emulated in Iraq."

Rintawi concludes: "With the exception of two small countries - Kuwait and Jordan - each country that neighbors Iraq has agendas and considerations that sometimes meet and often clash. This is what made it possible for Turkey to exceptionally side with Iran and Syria and hence, led to the issuance of a loose communique written in large font, about a meeting that stole the lime light for a period of 48 hours only."
GNEHM